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SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: ACOTA COORDINATOR VISIT SUMMARY

Classified By: ECON OFFICER ERFANA DAR FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

¶1. (U) Summary: ACOTA Program and Policy Coordinator, Chip Beck (Coordinator), visited Abidjan 13-14 May 2006 for a visit to, and an exchange of information with, the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Cote d'Ivoire (UNOCI) Headquarters Staff. He received a general briefing from the Senior Officer in Charge of Staffing, Colonel Aziz (Bangladesh) and Chief Operations Officer Colonel Wecker (France) on the status of their operations in Cote d'Ivoire and their assessment of the performance of ACOTA trained troops under their command. Coordinator was assisted and accompanied by Econoff, Deputy DATT, and the TDY Air Attache. He was afforded a post-brief by the DCM after the UNOCI site visit. The coordinator had an excellent opportunity to obtain firsthand insights into the field performance of ACOTA partners and assess potential needs for future peace support operations (PSO) training. End summary.

¶2. (U) UNOCI Briefing: Bangladeshi Colonel Aziz provided a standard Power Point briefing on the UNOCI operations, but the most informative part of the meetings came in the informal exchange of views during and following the official briefing. Neither Colonel Aziz nor French Colonel Wecker was familiar with ACOTA, so the Coordinator provided them with a thumbnail overview of the US PSO training program and a rundown of ACOTA partner countries. Surprisingly, Colonel Wecker was not particularly familiar with the French RECAMP program either, or the British BPST, so both force commanders were interested to learn more about who is training African forces, why, and how. The ACOTA partners with significant troops present are Senegal, Nigeria, Benin, and Ghana, all of whom are performing well in general, but with the below-noted problems that occur during times of calm. With regard to non-ACOTA countries serving the UNOCI, the UN commanders noted that the forces from Niger are "good soldiers" and they are happy with them. (ACOTA Coordinator Comment: Niger is interested in joining ACOTA, and is under consideration as an ACOTA partner in FY 2007. End Comment.)

¶3. (U) Recommendations: The ACOTA Coordinator believes that ACOTA Program Office might consult with the UN DPKO offices in New York to insure that future UN force commanders receive at least a standard backgrounder on ACOTA, RECAMP, and BPST, prior to deployment, along with specific details on which of their African forces have received training in one or more of the PSO training programs. The reason for this briefing would be to open additional doors and communications channels with the force commanders so that ACOTA might in the future receive periodic and UN-sanctioned input from PSO commanders on the performance levels and training needs as they perceive them in the field.

¶4. (C) UN Observations From the Field: When questioned as to the performance levels of the ACOTA and non-ACOTA African units, the UN commanders initially attempted to be general in their comments, rather than too specific, to avoid the appearance of being critical toward any one country.

However, in the course of offering examples, they eventually did get into specifics. Most of the examples were either positive or correctable with training. One interesting sound bite from Colonel Wecker was his assessment that "Africans make the best peacekeepers in Africa" because of their knowledge of the languages, cultural factors, and societal nuances. More often than not, they also "infiltrate" the communities they serve, in ways that, perhaps unintentionally at times, assists in acquiring information and intelligence that forewarn their unit commanders of impending trouble. Colonel Aziz concurred with that assessment, noting that the Pakistani and Bangladeshi troops were hampered not only by their lack of knowledge of French and local languages, but as with the Europeans, also by their ethnicity. Simply put, the Africans fit in, whereas non-Africans stand out and are isolated. It is an obvious observation, but one that supports the policy goal of training more, and more competent, African peace-keeping operations (PKO) forces for the Regional Brigades and African Standby Force (ASF). Colonel Wecker also commented that the African PKO forces performed exceptionally well in times of crisis, not only due to their foreknowledge of problems, but due to what he described as their cultural acceptance of doing what needed to be done in difficult situations. "A Senegalese is not afraid to wade into the crowd and crack a few heads to disperse them," he noted, "whereas a Pakistani may be unsure of himself in a situation with foreigners." As an example, the two commanders noted that in recent civil demonstrations and rioting, the Senegalese quelled a disturbance, while Bangladeshi elements were routed by the crowds.

15. (C) On a more critical note, Colonel Wecker noted that while the Africans perform well under pressure and in times of crisis, their military discipline tends to deteriorate

ABIDJAN 00000606 002 OF 002

significantly during periods of calm, during which times they may turn to drinking, socializing, and carousing with the locals, or just "slacking off." This has also caused some unintended long-term problems, such as local pregnancies fathered by African peacekeepers. (ACOTA Coordinator Comment: This example of disciplinary problems was later discussed with Burkina Faso Army trainers at the Non-Commissioned Officers Training Academy in Ouagadougou, where they noted they place a high premium on discipline and force structure. As ACOTA seeks to assist the African Union and Regional Brigades build the most solid PSO forces possible, the issue of image, discipline, and role-modeling needs to be continually stressed, perhaps even more than it already is. End Comment.)

16. (C) Challenges Faced by the UN: Problems noted by the UN Commanders were: the difficulty in maintaining vehicles; difficulty in collecting short-term, time-critical intelligence; insufficient number of PKO forces to blanket all the areas they need to control, leading to deployment of smaller elements that can be isolated or cut-off; and effective communications discipline during crisis. In terms of the limitations of the UNOCI, the commanders noted that their force strength was generally insufficient to deal with the thousands of hostile civilians that could be mobilized by the Young Patriots or warring factions on short notice, and who can descend very rapidly in large numbers on UNOCI units that are then outnumbered and overwhelmed. Both Colonel Aziz and Wecker maintained that creating general stability and implementing the DDR processes are the general and preferred answer to correcting this situation. It was noted that there needs to be a change in the mandate for UNOCI to implement DDR and they estimate UNOCI needs at least three more reinforced battalions over a period of six months to maintain security during the DDR process. Both commanders indicated that the general population is growing weary of the disturbances and the interruption they cause to civilian lives and jobs. They hope this frustration will eventually (soon) act as a deterrent to continued large-scale disturbances.

17. (U) Training recommendations: With regards to the type of training that is needed by the PSO forces, the UN commanders indicated that crowd control, reaction to demonstrations, and riot training were high on their list. Given the disturbances manifested by the Young Patriots as well as looters, unemployed persons, students, and mobs in general, the commanders indicated that not only did they need more forces trained in crowd control and as Quick Reaction Forces (QFR), but that those units also needed more specialized gear, such as shields, riot helmets, batons, and non-lethal weapons. (ACOTA Coordinator Comment: In the past, ACOTA has provided both training and equipment in riot control to military gendarmes. ACOTA will re-examine the need for more such training, particularly if the field missions PSO troops are entering can be identified as either urban situations, or even involve large refugee centers where demonstrations are not uncommon. As part of the "trainee packages," ACOTA is able to provide limited quantities of riot control equipment. End Comment.)

18. (C) ACOTA Coordinator Comment: The visit to the UNOCI was the first such mission area site visit by ACOTA in the past year. During the February 2006 African Union (AU) Training and Evaluation conference in Luanda, the Deputy AU Peace Support Operations Director (PSOD), Nigerian Major General Ishaya Hassan urged program directors from ACOTA, RECAMP, and BPST to conduct more such evaluations of PSO-trained troops "on location" in the mission areas. ACOTA plans to conduct additional mission area evaluations in the near term, including Darfur. This particular visit to Cote d'Ivoire was definitely useful for its tactical and operational insights, and afforded discussion points that were employed in the subsequent visit to Burkina Faso.
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